time to time. The last VSS was opened on 10.12.2000 for one month. The VSS stood extended upto 28.2.2001 in terms of order of High Court of Karnataka and the budget provision was made in anticipation of opting of VSS from all the employees. However, only 313 employees opted for VSS under this scheme and they were released by 31st March, 2001, BGML stands closed with effect from 1.3.2001 under Section 25(0) of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 in terms of Ministry of Labour, Government of India order dated 29.1.2001. However, the question of winding up/closure of BGML is *sub-judice* before Division bench of Karnataka because employees and other interested groups have filed a number of writ petitions.

Grants to Bharat Gold Mines Ltd.

1471. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to give grants to Bharat Gold Mines Ltd.;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the action proposed to make the mine viable by applying VRS?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF MINES (SHRI JAYSINGRAO GAIKWAD-PATIL: (a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) Bharat Gold Mines Limited (BGML) was referred to Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR) in 1992 when its net worth became negative due to continuous losses. BIFR having considered the case for eight years and three reports of Operating Agency, passed the final order on 12.6.2000 concluding that it is just, equitable and in public interest to wind up BGML under Section 20(1) of SICA, 1985. BIFR forwarded its opinion to High Court of Karnataka on 30.6.2000. BGML stands closed with effect from 1.3.2001 under Section 25(0) of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 in terms of Ministry of Labour, Government of India order dated 29.1.2001. The question of winding up/closure of BGML is *sub-judice* before Division Bench of Karnataka because employees and other interested groups have filed a number of writ petitions.

Government had announced VRS/VSS on a number of occasions. The last VSS was opened on 10.12.2000 for one month and it was extended upto 28.2.2001 in terms of orders of High Court of Karnataka. In anticipation of VSS offers, a budget provision for grant to BGML was made this year. But, there are no pending applications for VSS in the current financial year.

Mineral exploration

1472. SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to encourge exploration of prospective mines excavation and its distribution in the potentially mineral rich States;

(b) if so, the names of States and the steps taken to explore existence of new mineral wealth;

(c) whether, with a view to give the necessary fillip it is also proposed to form an Indo-French Working Group on mineral exploration; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF MINES (SHRI JAYSINGRAO GAIKWAD PATIL): (a) Yes, Sir. The initiatives of the Government are aimed at encouraging exploration and development of the mineral resources in the potentially mineral rich States, Exploration of minerals are being carried out through its own agencies like Geological Survey of India (GSI) and Mineral Exploration Corporation Limited (MECL), State DGM's and by the private sectors.

(b) Mineral exploration will be continued by GSI in all mineral rich States. MECL is continuing exploration in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Orissa and West Bengal. 109 prospecting licences/reconnaissance permits have been granted in favour of many multinational companies for aerial prospecting in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat,